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Safety Training for Employers and Supervisors of Adolescent Farmworkers

Mary E. Miller, Child Labor Specialist in the Employment Standards Program, and Mike Gempler of the Washington Growers' League, are working together on a pilot project to reach agricultural employers who employ young workers under age 18. The project is part of a larger national effort called Safety Training for Employers and Supervisors of Adolescent Farmworkers (STESAF). This project is being conducted by the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety with a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The National Children's Center is nationally recognized as a leader in the injury prevention, health promotion, agricultural safety and related topics. It is located at the National Farm Medicine Center at the Marshfield Clinic in Wisconsin.

The goal of the project is to assist employers of youth in order to improve the health and safety conditions for hired adolescent workers through outreach and education. Washington State professionals have experience which has made this collaboration possible. Ms. Miller has worked for several years, through a partnership with the Washington Restaurant Association to bring a similar model of educational workshops to employers of youth in restaurants. Mr. Gempler is the Executive Director of the Washington Growers' League Western Vice-President of the National Council of Agricultural Employers.

Washington State's role has been to participate in the development of a pilot workshop among a small group of berry and tree fruit growers to determine if this approach may be useful elsewhere. Recently, two workshops were held as part of this effort, one in Bellingham and one in Yakima. Topics covered included proactive strategies for regulatory compliance associated with adolescent farmworkers; principles of child development applicable to work assignments for youth; discussion of data regarding agricultural diseases and injuries incurred by adolescents; and adolescent worker health and safety recommendations. Follow-up with the pilot participants will provide technical assistance for handling health and safety issues unique to their situation.

Prior to this pilot workshop a national survey of agricultural employers was done to identify their practices and concerns regarding the hiring of youth for agricultural jobs. This report "Benchmarking Report: Hiring and safety practices for adolescent workers in agriculture", provides an initial summary of the reasons employer do or do not hire youth, perspectives on having teens in the workplace, types of safety practices used by employers of youth, and needed safety resources identified by employers. More information on the project and copies of this report can be obtained by contacting Mary Miller at 360.902.6041 or mmar235@Lni.wa.gov or Mike Gempler at 509.575.6315 or mgempler@growersleague.org.